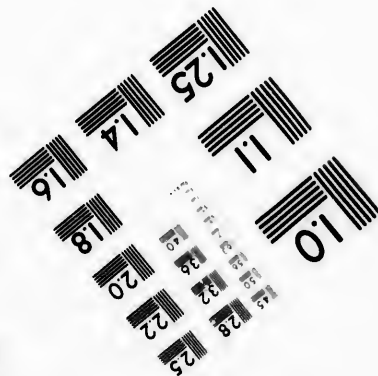
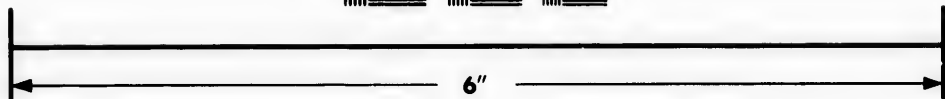
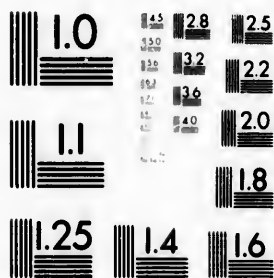


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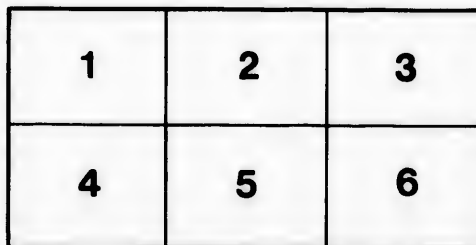
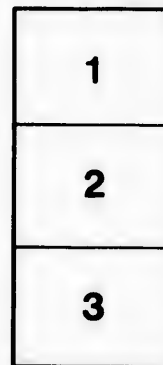
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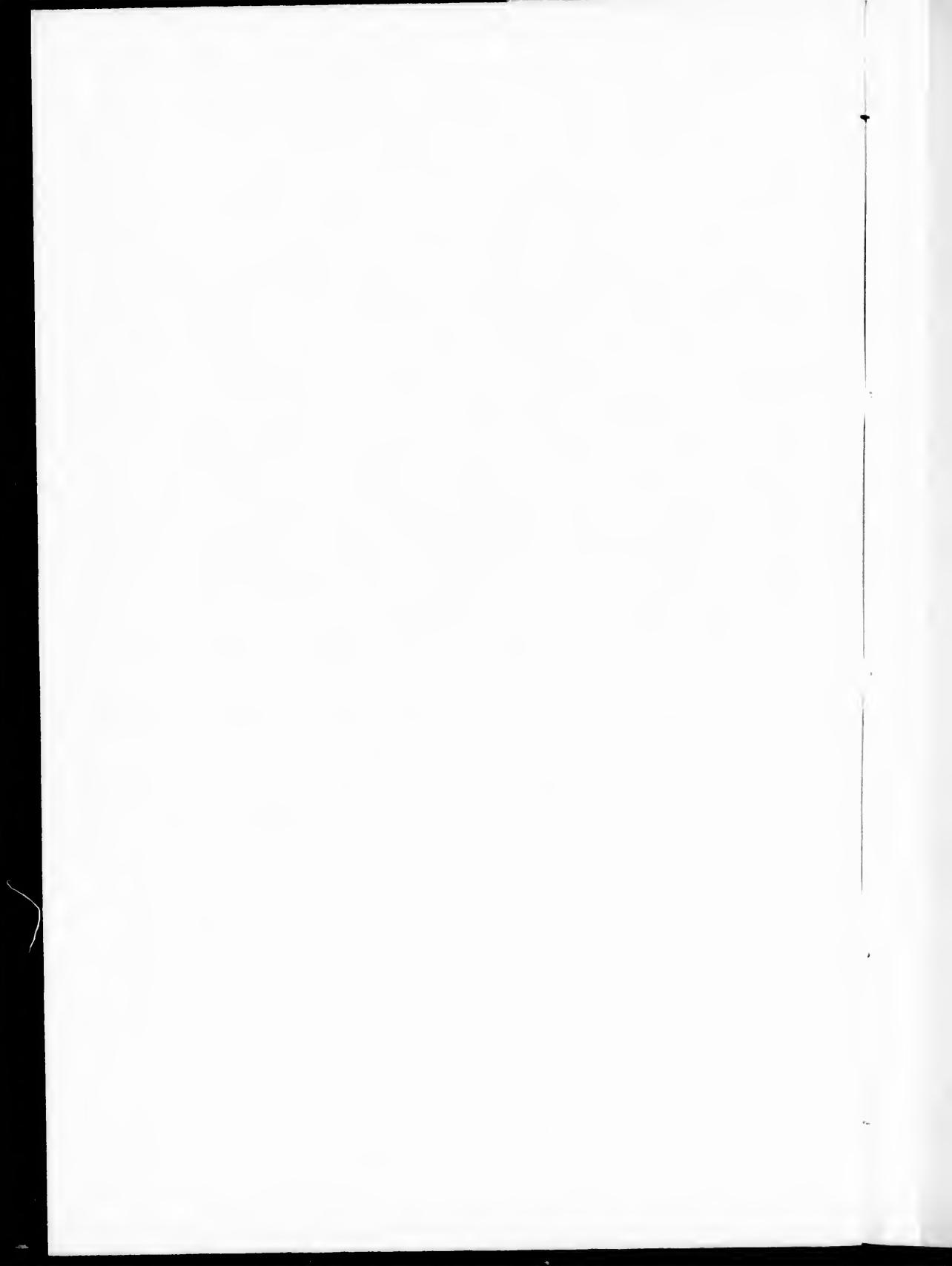
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A PLEA
FOR
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IN THE
EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY:

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE CENTRE WELLINGTON MINISTERIAL
ASSOCIATION, AND THE WELLINGTON COUNTY
S. S. ASSOCIATION.

By JAMES MIDDLEMISS,
Minister of Chalmers' Church, Elora.

TORONTO:
PRESBYTERIAN PRINTING HOUSE, 5 JORDAN STREET.

1883.



*J. B. Barron
Minister*

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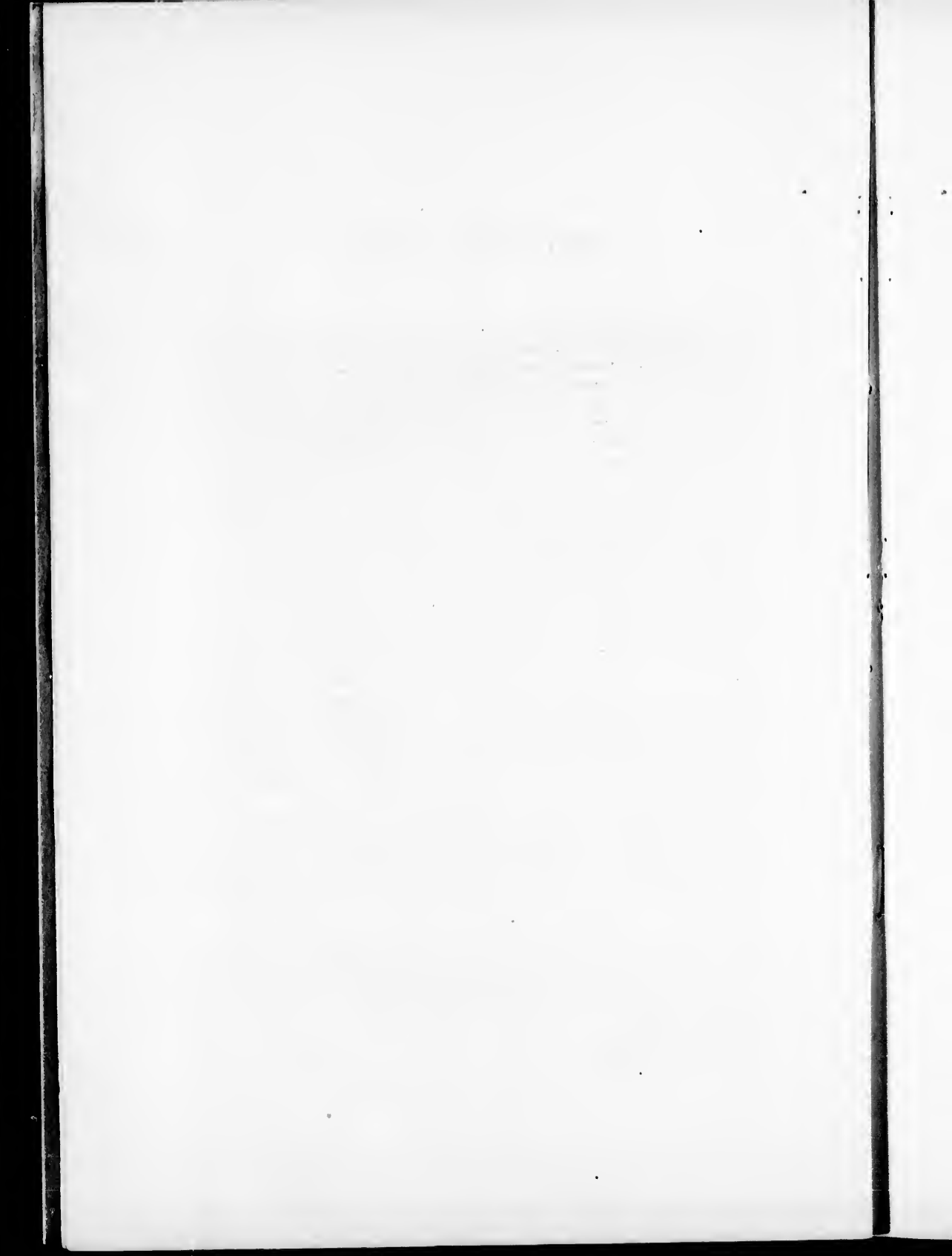
PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following paper is submitted to my fellow-labourers in the work of Christian instruction, in the hope that it may be of service in the way of calling attention to the important subject to which it refers. It was originally prepared, about a year ago, for the Ministerial Association of Centre Wellington, and was afterwards read at the Annual Meeting of the County S. S. Teachers' Association. It is now published in accordance with a desire expressed by the latter Association, whose membership includes all the members of the Ministerial Association. Any hesitancy I had in complying with this desire has been removed by consultation with a friend, who occupies a prominent position in the Presbyterian Church, and for whose judgment I have such respect, that, had he expressed any doubt as to the propriety of the publication of the paper, I would probably have given up all thought of it.

Having, in view of publication, looked into the books on the subject that I had ready access to, I did not find anything in them of such a nature as to suggest any modification, even in expression, of the views presented in the *first* part of the paper. It is therefore published, almost word for word, as it was read. I could not, however, refrain from giving, in a note, some extracts from Haliburton's "Essay Concerning Faith," a short treatise of permanent value, in which a man of a high order of intellect and of great reasoning power, handles the subject of the internal evidence in such a way as to show how well he knew, as a matter of personal experience, that, notwithstanding his intellectual superiority and the extent of his acquirements, he was on the same level as the unlearned Christian, in respect of the grounds of a full persuasion of the divine origin and authority of the teachings of Scripture.

The *second* part having been at first written somewhat hastily, I felt that I could not present it to the public, without such a measure of expansion as might remove the offence arising from the disproportion between the two parts of the paper in its original form. In accordance with the suggestion of the friend referred to, I have appended a note on Hume's Argument against Miracles; and, lest any one should think that I wish to evade by mere strength of assertion a difficulty that, in these times, is the chief perplexity of many sincere Christians, I have added a *third* note, containing two extracts which, I think, candid readers will regard not only as sustaining the assertion of the text, but as illustrating the fact that, while some minds are open to conviction in reference to Divine revelation, other minds are fast closed against it.

ELORA, May 15, 1883.



A PLEA
FOR
POPULAR INSTRUCTION
IN THE
EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE period during which our Lord appeared and asserted His claims as a divinely commissioned teacher was one distinguished by the diffusion of the highest form of ancient culture. The golden age of the literature and philosophy of Greece had passed away; but its best and most enduring productions had become the study of thoughtful men throughout the Roman empire, including the country where Jesus of Nazareth was born, and to which His personal ministry was confined. We can see the wisdom of God in arranging that Christ should appear, not in an age of intellectual darkness and among a barbarous people, but at a time when the highest form of ancient culture was most fully developed and most widely diffused, and among a people who possessed a sacred literature which presented exalted views of the Divine nature and perfections, such as were nowhere else to be found. It resulted from this, that His claims were subjected to such a searching examination as they could not otherwise have been; and we know, as a matter of history, that those claims were established to the satisfaction of multitudes of all classes in all parts of the empire.

The validity of the claims of Jesus of Nazareth may be satisfactorily established in more ways than one. In other words, there are various lines of argument fitted to produce a rational conviction that He was a teacher sent from God. But, I presume, we are all agreed that there is one way which has the great advantage over all others, that it is open to all and is more

satisfactory than any other. I refer to the way of which our Lord Himself speaks, when he says, "If any man will do" (or, as you may be aware, more precisely and correctly, according to the original, "if any man is willing to do") "the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or whether I speak of myself," John vii. 17. This, of course, does not imply either a perfect knowledge of the will of God, or a perfect conformity to it in conduct; but simply an honest desire and aim to do the will of God, on the part of a man who may be very ignorant of God's will, and conscious of much imperfection, shortcoming and sin, in his best endeavours to do it—a desire and aim, his possession of which is proved by his actually, though it may be very imperfectly, doing what he already knows, or has reason to believe, to be the will of God, and actually using means such as are accessible to him to obtain further light in regard to it.

We can all see the wisdom and goodness of God, in the way here indicated of attaining a conviction of the divinity of the teachings of Jesus. For, (1.) It is a way open to all. It does not require qualifications which only *a few men* can possess; but simply a qualification which all men may and ought to possess—we might even say, far less than they ought to possess. It does not require that men should be philosophers, or scientists, or adepts in history; but simply that they should possess a willingness to do the will of God. There are other ways in which a rational conviction may be produced in the mind, that the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth is divine. It can be proved historically that he appeared in Judea at or near the time usually assigned to His appearance; that He astonished His countrymen by His works and His teaching; that, having been put to death as an impostor and blasphemer, He rose from the dead and thereby fully vindicated His claims. The facts of the Gospel history, including the resurrection of Jesus, can be proved by evidence incomparably stronger than any evidence that can be adduced in proof of any of the other events of ancient history, the evidence being not only greater in amount, but of a kind altogether peculiar—for such is the suffering testimony of the early Christian witnesses. But comparatively few can make a thorough study of this evidence. An unlearned Christian must accept the facts of Gospel history (*i.e.*, in their historical character) just as he accepts other and well-known facts of history. And, in the one case as well as in the other, it is an outrage on common sense to say that he has no good reason to accept them. He is, on the contrary, fully justified in the persuasion, that neither the facts of the Gospel history nor the facts of ancient common history could have commanded the general acceptance that they have

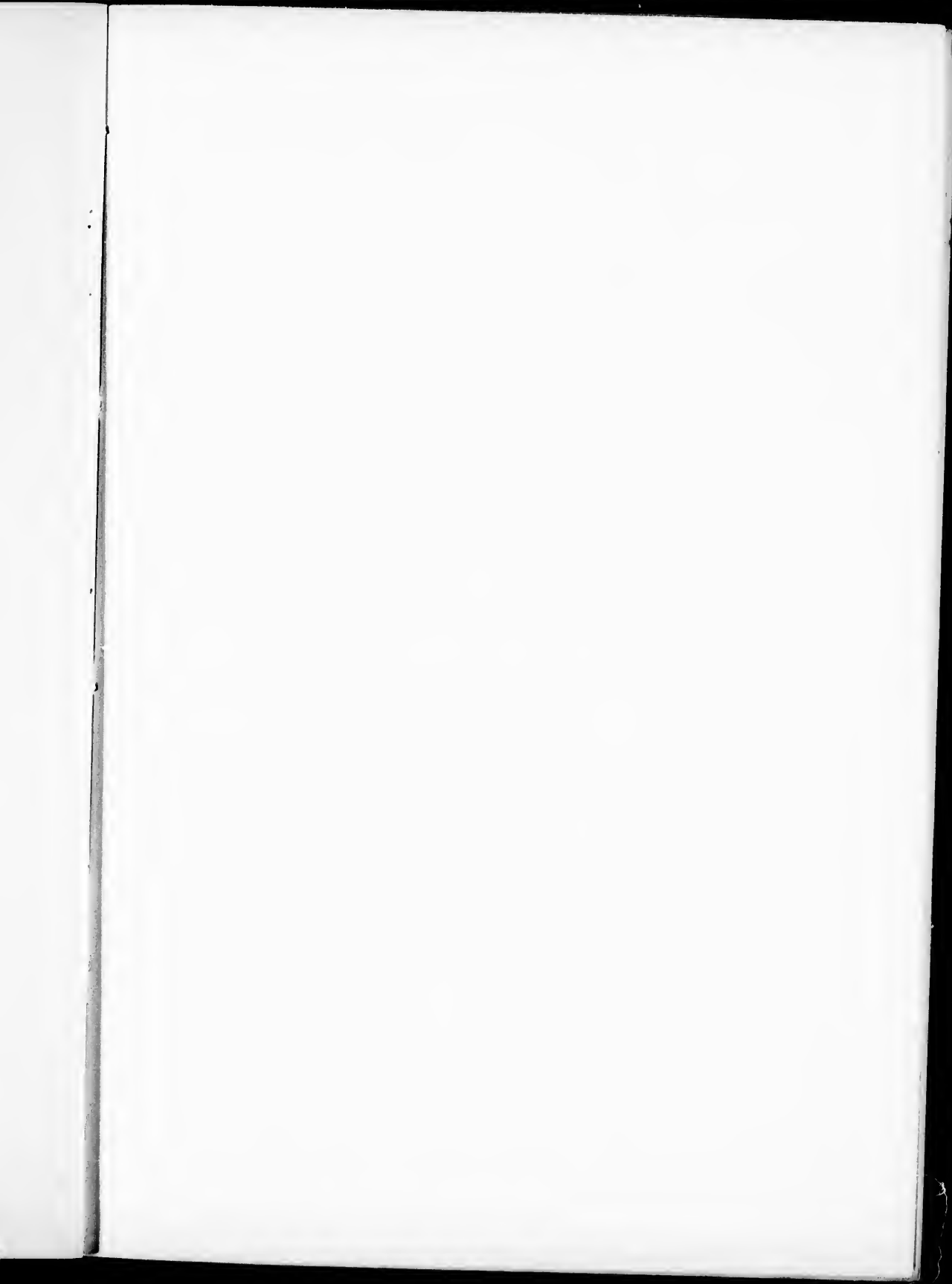
done, except for their truth. It is very easy, of course, for one who is so disposed to start difficulties which an unlearned Christian is unable to solve; just as Dr. Whately has proposed difficulties in relation to the first Napoleon which only one well acquainted with the history of his time could satisfactorily answer. But while the unlearned Christian has good reason to accept the facts of the Gospel history, just as unlearned men have good reason to accept the facts of common history, he is not competent to reason out the matter in detail, in the face of the man who chooses to question them. If, therefore, Jesus had made the full assurance of the divinity of His teaching to depend on the historical evidence of the facts of the Gospel history, the attainment of such assurance would be quite beyond most men; because very few men have, or can have, the mental training and the historical knowledge that are necessary in discussing the questions that may be raised. The Gospel, in that case, would have been a Gospel for the few, and not for the many, or for all. Only think of Jesus Christ telling men that in order to come to a satisfactory assurance of the divinity of His teaching, they must become philosophers, or scientists, or adepts in historical studies! The wisdom and goodness of God have determined otherwise. Jesus Christ came into the world, not with good news for learned men and philosophers, or for other men through them, but with good news directly for all men, including the poor and the unlearned, whom the pride of social distinction and of intellectual culture despises. In accordance with the design of God's loving regard for all classes of men, not only is the peculiar Gospel itself level to the apprehension of the meanest rational capacity, but the full and firm persuasion that it is from God depends not on qualifications which few can possess—not on high intellectual development, or on large acquisitions of knowledge—but on a qualification that all men may possess, and ought to possess—a moral qualification, consisting in a simple willingness to do the will of God.

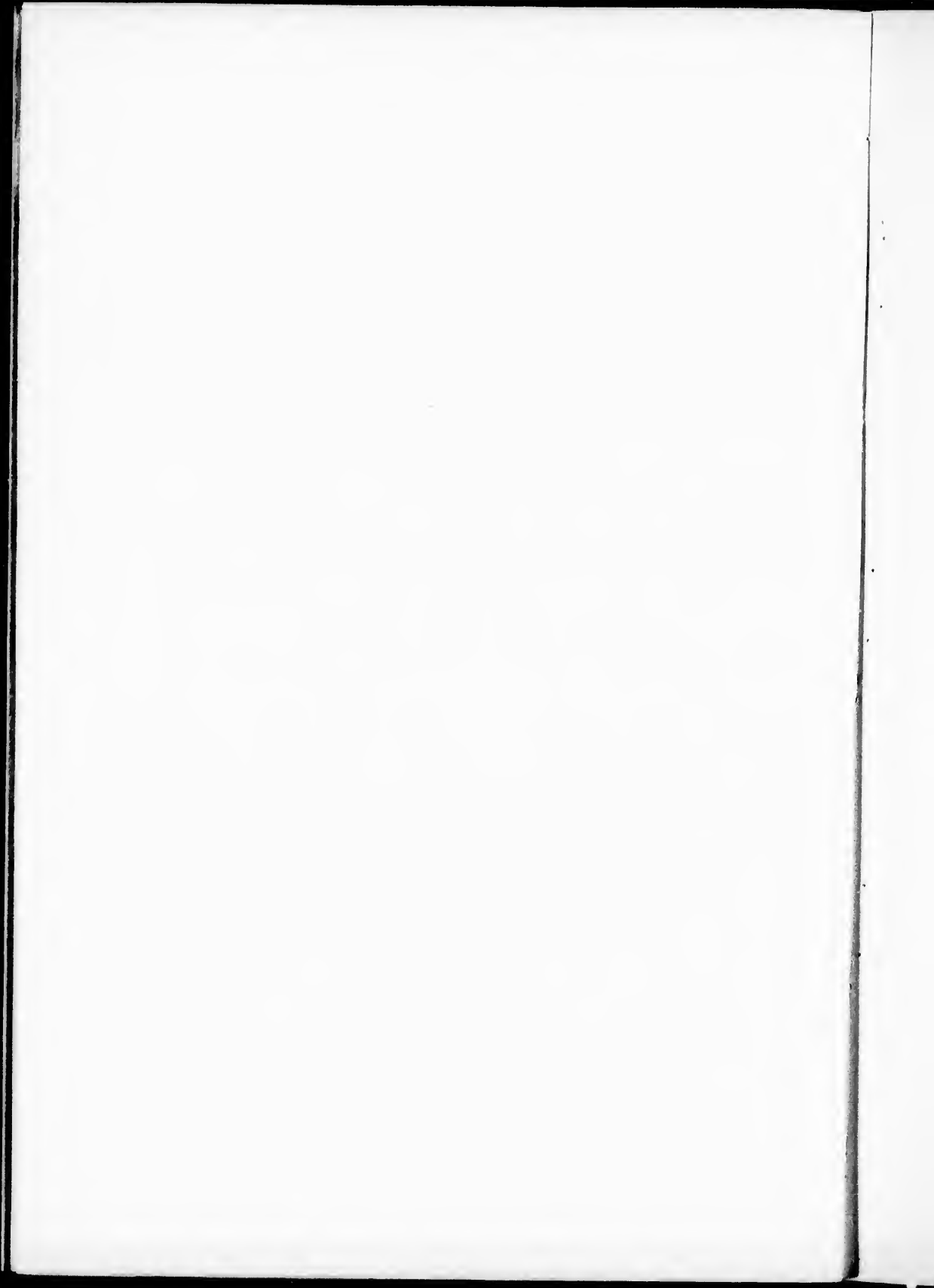
(2.) The demand for this qualification cannot be regarded as a hard requirement. This could not be said of a demand that a man should become learned in history, in order to his being capable of a full assurance of the divinity of Christ's teaching. Compliance with such a demand were an impossibility in perhaps ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. But Jesus makes no such demand. He accords no advantage either to the adepts in philosophy, science, or history, who are necessarily few, or to the smatterers, whose name is legion. He requires nothing beyond a willingness to do the will of God—a requirement such that no other can be thought of so simple, reasonable, and practicable. Who can possibly find fault with the requirement that

a man shall be what every man ought to be? And far less than this is the requirement, seeing it is neither a *perfect knowledge* of the will of God, nor a *perfect conformity* with it in practice that is demanded, but only the sincere and honest desire and aim to do the will of God, associated, it may be, with much ignorance and imperfection.

The sequel of this paper will show that I have no wish to depreciate the historical evidence of Christianity. But I believe it is of no little importance that prominence should be given to the great truth, that the highest and most satisfactory evidence of the divinity of Christian teaching is *equally accessible to all*, as depending not upon intellectual qualifications such as can be possessed only by a few, but upon a moral qualification that all ought to possess, and the want of which is highly blameworthy. And at the same time, it would be well, in dealing with this subject, to endeavour to make it plain to the intelligence of our people that this evidence is, in its very nature, at once the highest obtainable and satisfying beyond any other. For, I believe, we can give a most sufficient answer to the question which it is natural to ask: "How can a man who is destitute of learning, who has little or no historical knowledge—it may be even a child—not only understand the Gospel, but have a well-grounded persuasion that it is from God?" Of course, if such a persuasion is attained otherwise than by a competent acquaintance with the external evidence, the ground of it must lie in the Gospel itself. Nor is it anything but what is in accordance with reason that the doctrine of a teacher sent from God should be such as to approve itself divine, and that it should do so not to all men indiscriminately, but only to such, and surely to such as are willing to do the will of God. Let us illustrate this.

There are two ways in which we may have a satisfactory persuasion regarding a man, that he is possessed, say, of great integrity and benevolence. Trustworthy persons may testify to his possession of these qualities. But we may have an equally reasonable, and even far stronger persuasion, without any testimony. We may know the man by intimate acquaintance with him, so that we can ourselves certify to others his possession of these qualities, instead of needing to have it certified to us. Again, there are two ways in which we may have a full persuasion that a certain piece of writing is the production of some particular man. We may have trustworthy information that he is the author of it. Or we may be so well acquainted with his style of thinking and writing, that we have no sooner begun to read than we know with the fullest conviction that he, and no other man, is the author. And so it is with the teaching of Christ. A man may have a reasonable and strong conviction





that it is from God, by his study of the evidence of the facts of the Gospel history. But he may have an equally reasonable and far stronger conviction, derived from the teaching itself. He may, as our Lord very distinctly and decidedly intimates, have such a knowledge of God as to be able to recognize God's voice when He speaks. Is it not in the highest degree reasonable to suppose that, if there is a God who is the perfection of all that is great and good, a creature that he has made capable of knowing Him, should so know Him as to be able to recognize His voice, or, in other words, able to determine, from the character of a professed message from Him, whether that message is really from Him; while another creature, though also capable of knowing Him, may be so ignorant of Him as not to be able to recognize His voice? Is there such a difference between one man's knowledge of a human author and another man's knowledge of him, that the one knows at a glance that a certain piece of writing is his production, while the other is utterly incompetent to form any judgment in the matter; and may there not be such a difference between one man's knowledge of God and another man's knowledge of Him, that the one can recognize the voice of God when He speaks, while the other cannot? It is so, according to the teaching of Christ. And, in accordance with this teaching, it is a matter of fact in human experience, that there are men who can recognize God's voice and men who cannot. These two classes of men are respectively those who are willing to do the will of God and those who are not. The man who is willing to do the will of God comes to know that the teaching of Jesus is from God, by attaining such a knowledge of Him as to be able to recognize His voice—an ability which the man who is not willing to do the will of God cannot acquire.

There can be no objection to the views now presented, arising from the fact of man's native depravity and ignorance of divine things, neither of which frees him from the obligation resting on him as God's rational creature. As we have already said, a man who is very ignorant of the will of God, and conscious of much imperfection and sin may, notwithstanding, be truly willing to do the will of God; and he certainly is so, if he actually, though very imperfectly, endeavours to do the will of God in so far as he knows it, and uses available means to know it further. Did our limits permit, or were it required by the object of the present paper, it might be shown in detail that the man who is willing to do the will of God is *no other* than the *sinful* man who, under conviction of sin, has been led to inquire what he must do to be saved. But, inasmuch as it is in connection with conviction of sin, or the awakening of conscience, that what is commonly called the *moral* evidence of Christianity passes into what is

known under the distinctive name of the *experimental* evidence, it is not out of place to say that it is to the latter especially that the promise of our Lord must be considered as having respect. The experimental evidence is not less moral in its character than what is usually so named. If they differ it is only as *genus* and *species*. Or, perhaps, it is more correct to say that the experimental evidence is but the moral in its highest and full development. A man, whose conscience has not experienced the awakening which we are accustomed to refer to under the expression, *conviction of sin*, may doubtless have an appreciation of the morality taught by Jesus, more or less strong, according to the moral tone that his mind may have acquired under the operation of good influences of various kinds; and the moral teaching of Jesus may so impress the mind of such a man, as to be to him strong evidence that Jesus is a teacher sent from God. But it is only the man whose conscience has been awakened that is capable of so apprehending the teaching of Jesus as to *know*, and that *experimentally*, or as a *matter of experience*, that it is from God. It is only in the case of such a man that the full persuasion of absolute certainty is, or can be, attained. The process, if we may so speak, whereby this full persuasion is attained is, at every step, a moral one; which implies that a man's progress towards full persuasion will correspond with his sustained and increasing willingness to do the will of God. The motive of a man who, under conviction of sin, is led to inquire what he must do to be saved, may at first seem very low, and some may affect to despise it; but He who knows our guilt and depravity, and appeals to our own self-interest, will not despise the cry of the sinner who, feeling that he is ready to perish, would know what God would have him to do. However low his motive may be, it is enough meantime that it is effectual to start him on the way of doing the will of God. He will be actuated by higher motives as he progresses. Meantime, feeling that he is a lost sinner, having no hope or light save what comes from God, he will, by keeping the way on which his conviction of sin has started him, have, in due time, a full persuasion, arising out of his own personal experience, that the teaching of Christ's Gospel is divine.

In connection with this aspect of our subject, we are not to overlook the agency of the Spirit in the production of this full persuasion, but rather to give prominence to it, and that especially because of its practical bearing as constituting at once an obligation and an encouragement to prayer. We are to give no uncertain sound in relation to the truth, that though men may be influenced by historical testimony and by other lines of argument, yet a full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the teaching of Jesus is from the inward

work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in men's hearts. But it is to be noted that not the less on that account is the process by which this full persuasion is attained a *moral* process; and that not the less is the persuasion itself to be regarded as a reasonable persuasion, *i.e.*, a persuasion that rests on grounds which sound reason approves of. For, in the first place, the man who is under conviction of sin recognizes as the voice of God those utterances of the word respecting human depravity, guilt, and blindness, which are so offensive and repulsive to many. And, in the second place, there is such a fitness between man's moral necessities, which the teaching of Jesus assumes, and the provision which it announces—the provision so fits into the necessities—that the fitness constitutes the strongest evidence of the divinity of Christ's teaching, to the man who is able to see it, that is, to the man who is willing to do the will of God; while, of course, to another man, who cannot see this fitness, because of his want of the necessary qualification, it has no force or value. And, yet once more, the doctrine of Jesus, in giving to a man who is willing to do the will of God not only a knowledge of sin, but a power and success in his conflict with it, which all else fails to give, so approves itself to him as divine, that he becomes entrenched, as it were, in a stronghold of certainty from which nothing can dislodge him.

If the views that have now been presented are, as we all believe, in accordance with Scripture, and borne out in human experience, they fully warrant a certain very definite and decided mode of procedure or style of utterance on our part in relation to the infidelity that is current. In particular, I would say that both in our public teaching and in our private intercourse, as we may be called or have opportunity to refer to the subject under consideration, we should have no hesitation or dubiety in expressing ourselves in very decided terms in reference to three important points.

1. We should insist, certainly not in a headlong and indiscriminate way, but without any of the hesitancy that would indicate dubiety in our own minds, that the root of all infidelity in relation to Christ and His teaching is in the *will*, and not in the *intellect*—in the *heart* and not in the *head*. If a man lacks learning he is not at any disadvantage, and if he is possessed of learning it gives him no superiority, in so far as the attainment of a full persuasion of the divine authority of Christian doctrine is concerned. In the one case as in the other, the acceptance with full conviction of the claims of Jesus depends on a moral qualification which both are equally bound to possess. "If any man," learned or unlearned, "is willing to do the will of God," he shall surely come to a persuasion of the divine authority of

Christ's teaching. It follows from this, that if a man does not attain such a persuasion, it can only be on account of his being unwilling to do the will of God. He may not allow that he is so. He may think he is not; and we may not be able to convict him of his unwillingness. But such is the judgment of Christ Himself; and that is enough to determine our judgment, and to warrant our pressing the charge on men's consciences. The man may not be immoral in the ordinary sense of the term; but there are other ways besides immorality in which unwillingness to do the will of God operates. And I have no doubt that, if such a man were honest with himself in taking note of his own spirit and ways, he would see that the root of his infidelity is his unwillingness to do the will of God. With the judgment of Christ to sustain us, we should have no hesitation in affirming that, while we admit and deplore the evils of fanaticism and hypocrisy, their existence, and even their currency, cannot be legitimately pleaded as in the least discrediting the great truth that there is, as Christ teaches, a state of mind in which a man can recognize the voice of God when He speaks. Nor, in view of that judgment, constantly verified as we know it is in men's experience, should we have any hesitation in largely discounting the current talk about honest doubting, as being, to a very great extent, the cant of infidelity.

2. We should, while not forgetting the necessity of great discrimination in our judgments respecting individual men, have no hesitation in pressing the *criminality* of infidelity. If a persuasion of the divine authority of Christian doctrine depended on qualifications which few men can possess, then the great majority of men would be excusable in having no such persuasion. But when it depends on a qualification which all ought to possess; when, that is, the true cause of infidelity is unwillingness to do the will of God, infidelity can be nothing short of criminal. We shall afterwards refer to the perplexity of mind in relation to Christian truth that may be engendered by the utterances of the sceptic or the scoffer; but no sympathy that we may have with such as are perplexed, should lead to hesitation in the maintenance of the position that when the man, who is allowed on all hands to be the moral wonder of human history, puts the full proof of his claim as a divine messenger to the test of such a simple issue, no estimate can be formed of the criminality of the man who declines the issue, and fails to obtain satisfaction, for the sole reason that he is unwilling to do the will of God.

3. We should urge, and that not unfrequently, as required by the circumstances of the present time, the need that there is for advancement in that great attainment which is the privilege of all true Christians—the *capacity to recognise the voice of God*

when He speaks. For the vast majority of believers, this must be their great safety in relation to Christian truth and duty, in these days when every peculiar truth of the Gospel is assailed, and every distinctively Christian duty discredited by plausible reasonings. Our people should be constantly reminded that while the natural man cannot receive or even know the things of the Spirit of God—can neither rightly apprehend nor truly believe them, there is a power of spiritual discernment possessed by believers, in which it is their duty and privilege to grow—a power in the exercise of which they can discriminate between the voice of God and that of the father of lies.*

While impressed in accordance with the views now presented, with a conviction of the supreme value of the internal evidence of Christianity, we are not disposed to overlook the importance of the external evidence. On the contrary, we believe that, while it is of such a nature as to be peculiarly attractive and interesting to some minds, it possesses a force which only strong prejudice can resist, and that it can be presented to any one of fair intelligence in such a way as to exhibit its force and make a powerful impression on his mind. And we cannot but think that while there has always been, and ever will be, a verification in men's experience of the saying of Christ which we have so largely dwelt upon, there has been a serious neglect of the external evidence in connection with popular religious instruction; and that, while comparatively few can make a thorough study of the historical evidence, it is possible, and not at all difficult, to convey to our people such an apprehension of it as may be of great use to them. We have not merely to consider the personal safety of true believers, as infallibly secured by the word of God and through its instrumentality; we have to consider also their comfort and usefulness, which in these times especially are in danger of being greatly hindered, and are, no doubt, greatly hindered in many instances by the difficulties and perplexities that are occasioned by the constant reiteration of doubts, honest or dishonest. And I am persuaded that many sincere Christians whose safety is assured, might not only have their own perplexities removed, but be very helpful to others, if they only had a distinct apprehension, (1) of the way in which the facts of the Gospel history are proved in common with other historical facts, and that by an amount of evidence far exceeding that which can be adduced in proof of other universally accepted facts of ancient history; and (2) of the way in which objections of various kinds, whether inherited from former times or peculiar to modern times, can be met to the satisfaction of a mind that is not prejudiced

* See Note A.

by invincible disaffection towards the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the belief that our people generally, including at least a considerable proportion of our Sabbath Scholars, are perfectly capable of such an apprehension, I would submit the following practical suggestions:—

1. That in dealing with the subject of the miraculous attestation of the divinity of Christianity, attention should be largely concentrated on our Lord's resurrection as proving the divine authority of his teaching. I make this suggestion, because, while the resurrection of Christ is of the essence of the Gospel, and a fact whose acceptance carries with it the acceptance of all that is distinctive of Christianity, it is a fact on which the light of historical evidence shines more fully than it does on any other fact, whether ordinary or miraculous, of the Gospel history. I do not except even the death of Christ, because it is not the fact of His death, but that of His resurrection, that is sustained by the whole force of the *suffering* testimony of the early Christian witnesses. Now, surely, it cannot be difficult to make it plain to any person of ordinary intelligence, that the famous argument of Hume, which still continues to be implicitly relied upon by almost every assailant of Christianity, involves the fallacy of confounding all kinds of testimony, so as to attach to the highest the suspicion that belongs only to the lowest, and overlooks the fact that our confidence in the testimony of a man, even should we otherwise know nothing of him, is inversely as we see that his own interests are promoted or injured by the testimony that he gives; or, in other words, that this argument which, strange to say, is still made to do duty in the service of infidelity as vigorously as ever, proceeds on the assumption that, though the testimony of the Apostles and the other early martyrs, being not only disinterested, but given at the expense of every interest of a temporal nature, is the highest kind of testimony possible, it must have laid upon it all the suspicion that attaches to the testimony of witnesses of the most discreditable character.* Nor can it be difficult to make plain to an ordinary understanding, that the primitive martyrs are not to be classed with those who have, in all ages, evinced their sincerity by suffering for their religious beliefs or opinions, whether right or wrong; but that they suffered as witnesses of a fact respecting which, according to their own showing, they could not have been mistaken; or, in other words, that it was not as sincerely holding certain religious opinions that they suffered the loss of all things, but as the witnesses of a fact within the compass of their own personal

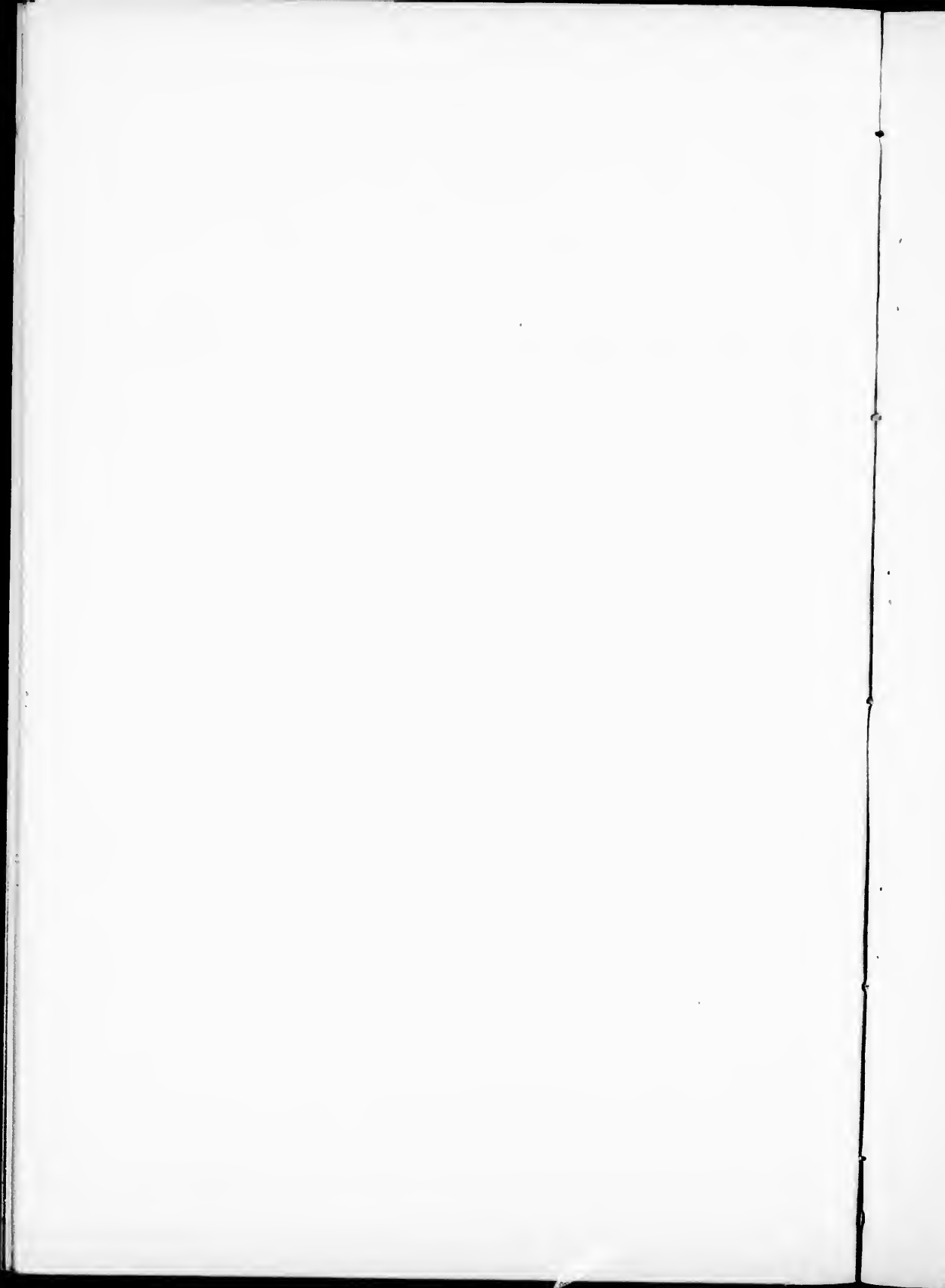
* See Note B.

observation. This distinction, important as it is, and, one would think, sufficiently obvious, is like the distinction overlooked by Hume, persistently disregarded by the opponents of Christianity, and is eloquently overlooked or kept out of sight by the author of "Supernatural Religion." Nor, again, can it be difficult to show to an ordinary understanding, that the universally current assumption of the more modern infidelity, that any reported fact of a miraculous nature, such as the resurrection of Christ, is to be at once discredited and set aside, without any consideration either of the proof by which it may be sustained, or of the possible end it may have been designed to subserve, involves nothing less than the assumption of man's competency and capacity to sit in judgment upon God, and to determine the procedure proper for Him in all possible circumstances; whereas, repudiating an assumption so monstrous, the Christian apologist's assumption is simply that of our competency to judge of our own human nature, by the knowledge we have of it from actual experience and observation,—a knowledge which, including as it does a knowledge of the laws that regulate human action, fully warrants the affirmation that the falsehood of certain kinds of testimony, or of testimony in certain circumstances, is immeasurably more incredible than the event, in whose favour it is given, is extraordinary and improbable. Nor, once more, can it be difficult to make it plain that it is unreasonable to expect, as the current infidelity insists, that God's revelations of Himself should be accompanied by such an amount of evidence as would carry conviction to the minds of all men indiscriminately, however they may be affected towards God; inasmuch as such an expectation can have no ground except the unwarrantable assumption that the attainment of full satisfaction of mind in relation to divinely revealed truth cannot, in any way or in any degree, depend on men's moral condition; whereas on the contrary, the most important moral purposes may be designed, as we can clearly see they are actually subserved, by God's giving just so much light as He does give and no more.

2. Our notice of the assumption last referred to, naturally leads to a suggestion respecting the mode of dealing with objections in connection with religious instruction. The objection to the divinity of Christian teaching involved in that assumption is often expressed with such confidence, and is so much a commonplace or first principle of unbelief, that its unreasonableness should be not unfrequently insisted on. It is said by one, for example, "There ought not to be the least shadow of a doubt whether a given book is from God or not." And again, "If the handwriting of Jehovah in the Scriptures be doubtful, it cannot be divine." The objection is not simply that the evidence of the

divinity of Christ's teaching is not demonstrative, but that it is not *indiscriminately* demonstrative, *i. e.*, equally demonstrative to all alike. Now certainly it is not demonstrative in the sense of our being warranted to write Q. E. D. at the end of it. But no less certainly it is, as we have already seen, if not demonstrative in the technical sense of the term, demonstrative in the sense of being sufficient to produce a full reasonable persuasion of mind. It is simply *not indiscriminately* demonstrative. Its production of a full persuasion depends on the state of the mind,—on the possession of a moral qualification that all ought to possess. And no man has a right to say, as the objection does in effect say, that God *ought*, if He speaks to men, to speak to them in such a way that their moral condition, or the way in which their minds are affected towards Him, shall *count for nothing* in respect of their capacity to recognise His voice. You may be familiar with a phrase of recent introduction, "the impieties of the pious." It is, no doubt, believed by its author to express in a pungent way, his condemnation of our persuasion of certain truths about Himself which, we believe, have been revealed to us by a Being whom he confidently affirms to be utterly unknowable. But he and those who think with him are strangely blind to the obvious fact, that their own assumptions imply, on their part, a knowledge of God far beyond anything we can pretend to—indeed an *infinite* knowledge of Him. Take as a specimen the assumption now before us. I think I may confidently say that no considerate person can fail to see which of these two positions is that of reverence and humility:—1. The position of the man who says (and in the very saying of it expresses his confidence that he knows God so well as to be able to say it), that God not only cannot, but should not make any revelation of Himself to men, except in such a way that the evidence of His making it shall be demonstrative; that he cannot and should not reveal Himself in such a way as shall be morally discriminative; that he cannot and should not reveal Himself in such a way that a man's moral condition shall have the slightest influence on, or be in the smallest degree tested by, his acceptance of the revelation; or, 2. The position of those who, believing that there may be a God to whom we are related as our Creator, Sustainer, and Moral Ruler, and who can communicate to us information respecting Himself in such measure and in such ways as His infinite wisdom may determine, profess to value what they think they have sufficient evidence to believe He does make known to them, to see its adaptation to their felt moral necessities, and to see that important purposes are subserved by His giving just such evidence as He has given—purposes that

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clearly could not be subserved by His giving evidence that would carry conviction to the minds of all men indiscriminately?

I trust I have not given undue prominence to the objection above referred to. I think prominence should be given to it, because, though it is in arrogant opposition to the wisdom of God, and is in itself altogether unreasonable, there are very many who, on the ground of it, consider themselves justified in paying no attention to the claims of religion. This leads me to remark that, as a matter of fact, almost all who reject the teaching of Christ do so on the ground of *objections*, without any thought of their obligation to give serious attention to the evidence which is fully sufficient to prove its divinity. In view of this fact, an obvious suggestion is, that it is of importance both that the minds of our people should as much, and, I would add, as early as possible, become more or less familiar with the evidences of Christianity in their principles and outlines, if not in detail; and that they should be strongly impressed with the conviction that it is at once unreasonable and *morally wrong* for a man to attach weight to objections, while his mind is perhaps a perfect blank or little more in relation to the evidences. Objections, reiterated after having been sufficiently met hundreds of times, will have comparatively little power to unsettle and perplex the mind of one who has, in some good measure, taken in the force of the Christian evidences; especially if he has been timeously impressed with the belief that many of these objections will lose all their force with his advance in knowledge, and with the conviction that the difficulties involved in others are necessarily incapable of solution by us, owing to the limited nature of our capacity in relation to the things of God, and that similar difficulties present themselves in connection with other departments of human knowledge, notwithstanding the great progress that has been made in them. I cannot well imagine how any candid mind, that is impressed with the immense strength of the Christian evidences, can be shaken in its conviction of the divinity of Christ's teaching by any or all of the objections that are brought against it. It will easily be made to appear to such a mind that the proof of the divinity of Christ's teaching cannot be set aside without discrediting all history and making it impossible, and without withdrawing all confidence from every universally-trusted record of ancient times, not one of which has come down to us with a hundredth part of the evidence we have for the purity, genuineness, and authenticity of some of the Christian records.

It is not in accordance with the design of this paper that I should go into details in dealing with objections, whether moral, historical, or scientific. That must be left to the judgment of

the Christian instructor. These objections, of whatever kind, can be shown to be of little or no weight in comparison with the strength of the evidence; many of them can be shown to be groundless, or founded on misapprehension; others can be so explained as to fortify the Christian position. And even the great objection in which the unbelieving mind has revelled in later times—I mean the objection drawn from speculations in cosmogony—can be so handled as to strengthen the proof of the inspiration of the Mosaic record.* Without going into details, my object has been to show that much good might be done, and much evil prevented, by a little systematic instruction bearing upon the issues raised by infidelity, which, while immensely important, are really much less numerous and far simpler than is generally supposed. Sooner or later, the objections to Christianity involved in these issues come to be presented to our young people; and the question is, Shall they, as they grow up, first hear of these objections from those who would lead them astray, or shall their religious instructors *anticipate* the efforts of the destroyer? Is it not far better that their minds should be *preoccupied*, by their being made acquainted with the way in which these objections can be met, than that their first knowledge of them should come to them in such a way as to lead them to think that they have been imposed upon with fables? However assured we may be of the safety of the genuine Christian, it can hardly be questioned that the great majority of our young people do not grow up so surrounded by an atmosphere of piety as to make their early conversion likely; and that accordingly the great majority of them do not give any very satisfactory evidence of their possession of genuine piety. And, though we shall always find that there are many who will not take their views of Christianity except from those who oppose it, and misrepresent or even caricature its teachings, we shall find many others—some of them “not far from the kingdom of God”—for whom much has been done, not without valuable results, in the way of instilling good principles into their minds; and if, with the training of their conscience and their sympathies in connection with Christian truth, there were combined appeals to their understanding, in relation to the important issues above referred to, their minds might be so intelligently prepossessed on the side of Christianity, that they would not be injuriously affected by assaults before which many succumb, and would also be helpful in preserving others.

* See Note C.

NOTES.

NOTE A, P. 13.

Extracts from Haliburton's "Essay concerning the Nature of Faith."

I.

"That light or objective evidence, whereon we are obliged to believe, and all who are subjectively enlightened do believe, the Scriptures," "is such that a more intelligible account by far may be given of it to those who have no experience of it than can be given of the objective evidence of visible objects to persons who have no experience of sight."

II.

"That many read the Scriptures, without discerning anything of this light, is no argument against it. For,

"1. Many want that supernatural ability, that understanding whereby God is known, whereby Christ's sheep know His voice from that of a stranger, and so, not being of God, they cannot hear His words.

"2. Many want and are utterly destitute of any tolerable notions of God. It is impossible that such should discern what is suitable to Him.

"3. Many have perverse notions of God riveted on their minds, and that both among the learned and unlearned, and finding the Scripture not suited to, but contrary to, those false preconceived impressions, they look on it as foolishness.

"4. Many want that humble frame of spirit which has the promise of divine teaching: 'The meek He guides in the way.' It is they who are fools in their own eyes who get wisdom.

"5. Many are proud and conceited deeply, and no wonder, then, that they know nothing.

"6. Many have the vanity of their minds uncured, and so hunt after vain things, and fix not in observation of what is solid, and thereby their foolish hearts are hardened, and their minds darkened and diverted.

"7. Not a few are under the power of prevailing lusts, disordered affections, and, out of favour to them, they are so far

from desiring an increase of knowledge that, on the contrary, they like not to retain God in their knowledge. What they already know is uneasy to them, because contrary to their lusts, and therefore they would be rid of it.

"8. Many there are that despise the Spirit of God, reject His operations, seek not after Him, contemn Him: and no wonder such as refuse the guide lose their way.

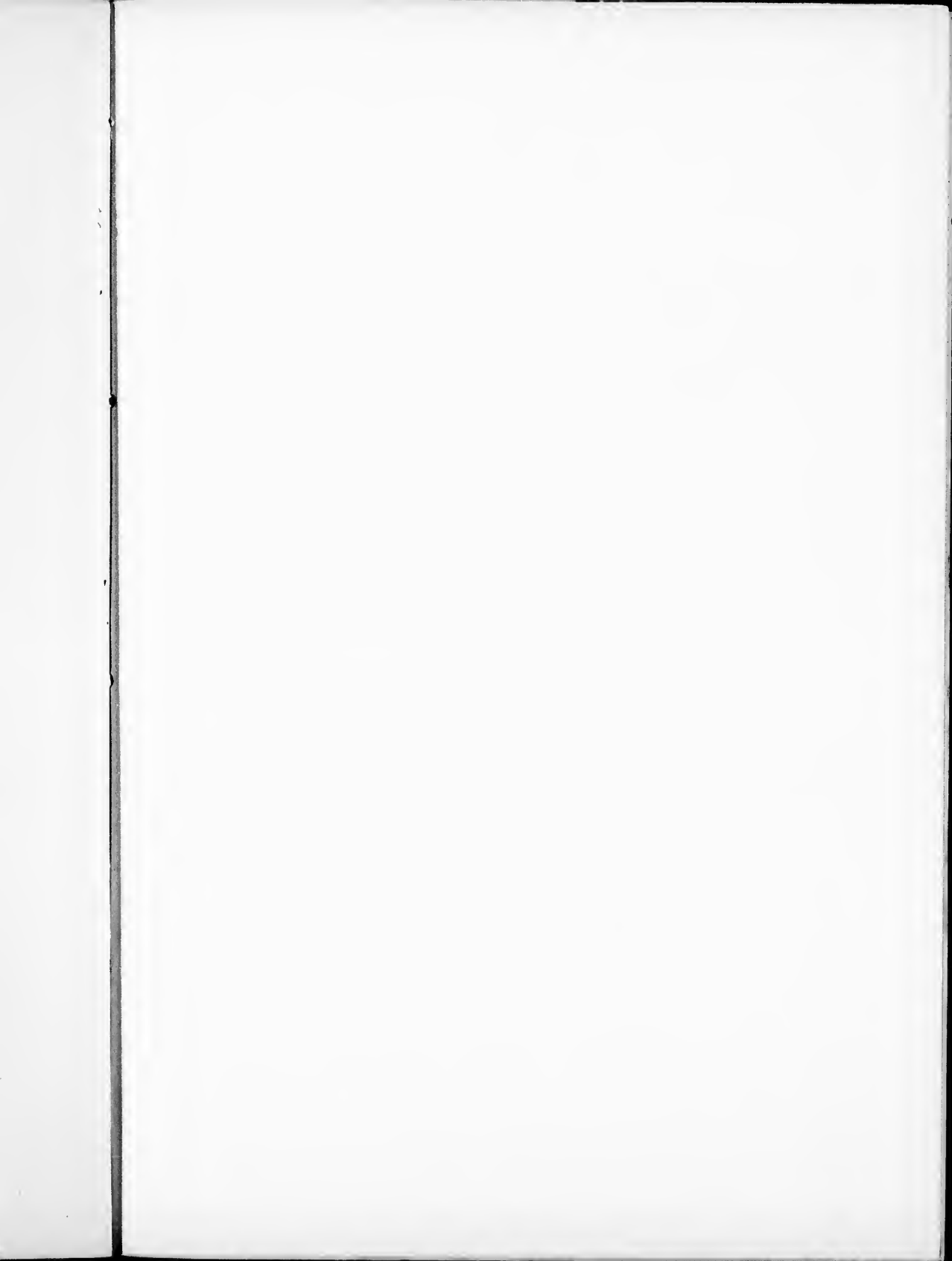
"9. Many, for those and other sins, are judicially left of God to the 'god of this world,' who blinds the minds of them that believe not.

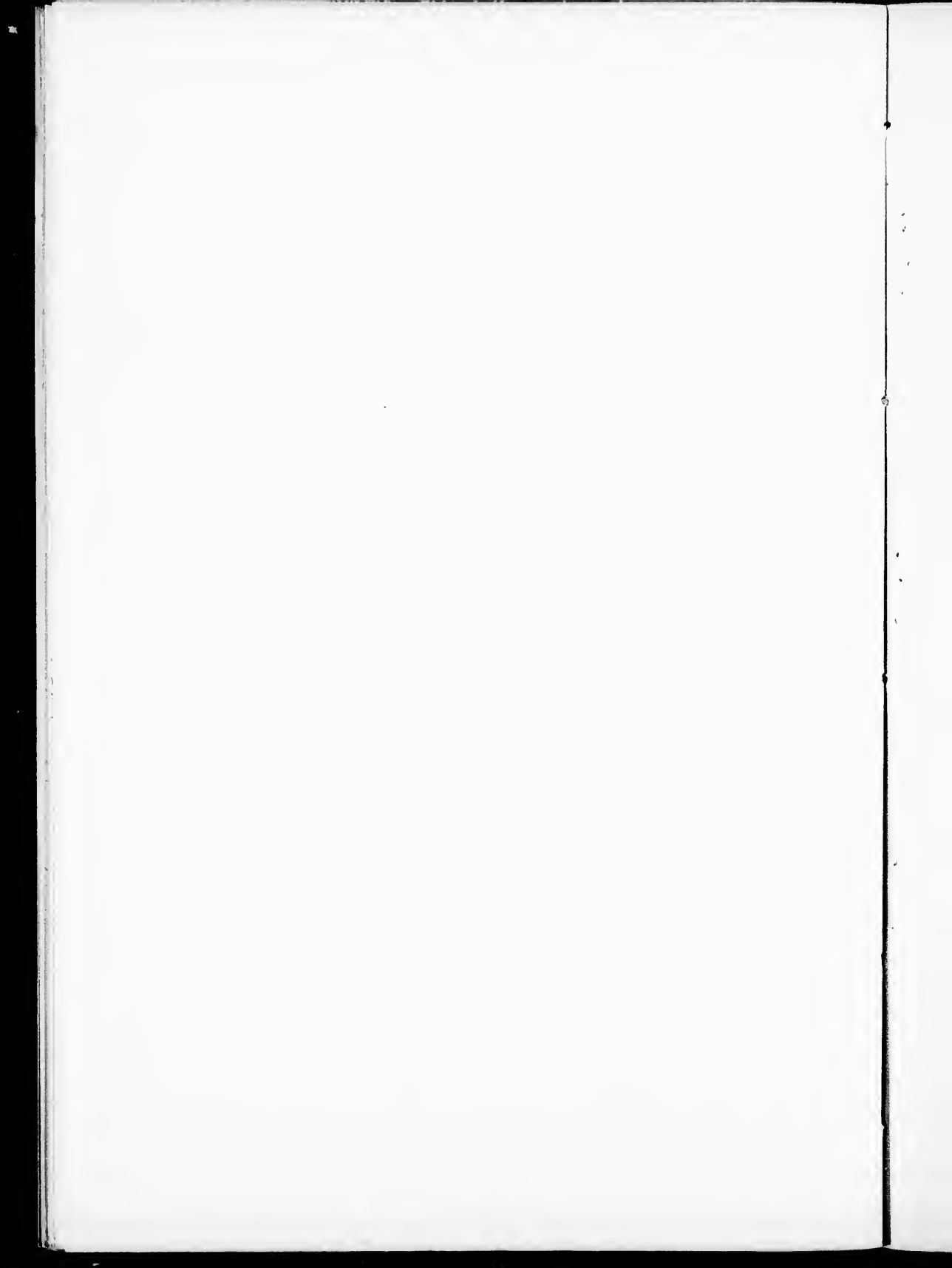
"10. Many *never attempt to do His will*, and so no wonder they come not to a discerning whether the word spoken and written is of God. And if all these things are considered, we shall be so far from questioning the truth, because many see not the evidence, that this very blindness will be an argument to prove the truth, and a strong evidence of the need of it, and of supernatural power to believe it.

"*Finally*, Persons sober and attentive want not some darker views of this evidence, which may and should draw on to wait for more. And I take the honourable concessions in favour of the Scriptures, made by adversaries, to have proceeded from some fainter view of this sort."

III.

"This power, whereby the Word evidences itself to be the Word of God and not of man, is nothing else save that authority and awful efficacy which He puts forth in and by it over the minds and consciences of men, working divinely, and leaving effects of His glorious and omnipotent power in them and on them. It enters into the conscience—a territory exempt from the authority of creatures and subject only to the dominion of God; it challenges, convinces, threatens, weakens, sets it roaring, and the creation cannot quiet it again. It commands a calm; and the sea that was troubled before is smooth, and devils and men are not able to disturb its repose. It enters into the mind, opens its eyes, fills it with a clear, pure, and purifying light, and sets before it wonders unknown concerning God, ourselves, our sin, our duty, our danger, and our relief, the works, the ways, the counsels, and purposes of God. It speaks to the will, converts it, and powerfully disengages it from what it was most engaged to, what it embraced, and was even glued to before, so that no art or force of eloquence, argument, fear, or hope could make it quit its hold. It makes it hastily quit its embraces, and turn its bent another way, the quite opposite way, and with open arms embrace what nothing could make it look





to before; takes away its aversion, makes it willingly not only go but run after what it bore the greatest aversion to before. It enters the affections, makes them rise from the ground, gives them such a divine touch that, though they may through their fickle nature be carried at a time by force another way, yet they never rest but point heavenward. It comes to the soul, sunk under the pressure of unrelievable distresses, sticking in the miry clay, refusing comfort, and in appearance capable of none, it plucks it out of the clay, raises it out of the horrible pit, sets its feet upon a rock, fills it with joy, yea, makes it exceeding joyful, while even all outward pressures and tribulation continue, yea, are increased. It enters into the soul, lays hold on the reigning lusts to which it formerly had submitted, and that with delight; it tries and condemns those powerful criminals, makes the soul throw off the yoke, and join in the execution of its sentence against and on them. Now, where the case is as thus stated, how can the soul that feels this powerful word, that comes from the Lord Most High, do otherwise than fall down and own 'that God is in it of a truth?'

NOTE B, P. 14.

Hume's "Argument on Miracles" is to the effect that, while it is contrary to universal and uniform experience that a miracle should occur, it is quite in accordance with experience that testimony (on which alone we must depend for proof of any reported miraculous fact) should be false; and that, therefore, no testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle. Hume admits that "there may possibly be miracles or violations of the usual course of nature of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony," and supposes an instance, while he thinks no such instance can be found in the records of history. But he contends that his argument applies with full force against a miracle in connection with any system of religion. In any such case, he says, a reported miracle is not only to be rejected, but to be rejected "without examination" of any testimony by which it may be supported.

However plausible the argument may appear, it would be difficult to find in any writer of name so large an amount of fallacy compressed into so small a space.

It is to be noted, in general—1. That, if the argument is sound, it must apply *universally*, and not be limited to miracles in connection with religion. If any discrimination is to be made,

it must be not against, but in favour of, a miracle that *may be* designed to authenticate a divine revelation, because such a design constitutes a *reason* for the miracle. 2. The argument is not against the *possibility* of a miracle, but against its *credibility*; it does not say that a miracle is *impossible*, but that even if a miracle did occur, its occurrence is *beyond the possibility of being proved*. The unreasonableness of this position is exhibited by Hugh Miller, in his own powerful style, in a chapter on the *Bearing of the Experience Argument*, in "Footprints of the Creator."

But apart from the above general considerations, it is to be noted, in particular, that the argument involves two fallacies, technically called 1. *Petitio principii*, or Begging of the question; 2. *Sophisma a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*, or reasoning as if what is true only in *particular circumstances* were true *universally*. The *former* fallacy is evident, without using a syllogistic form, if it be considered that the *universality* of experience which is affirmed is in reality the question at issue, that question being, Whether there is not in the experience of certain persons, *e.g.*, the early Christian witnesses, an *exception* to the *general* experience? To say, as Hume does, that the experience is *uniform and universal* is the same thing as to say that there is *no exception* to it; or, in other words, it *assumes* what has to be *proved*.

The *second* fallacy, which is the one referred to in the paper, is apparent, if it be considered that, while it accords with experience that human testimony may be false, *every kind* of testimony is not *equally liable* to suspicion. Whatever suspicion may attach to testimony given in certain circumstances, there are other circumstances in which testimony may be given that place it above all suspicion. We may suspect the testimony that a man gives, when his giving it is seen to lie in the line of his own interests; but we attach weight to his testimony given in a matter in which his own interests are not concerned. And we are warranted, from what we know of human nature, to hold that the falsehood of testimony given by men, with no prospect but that of evil in relation to the most valued temporal interests, is simply incredible. We may safely say of it, as we cannot say of a miracle, in the ordinary sense of the term, that it is contrary to *uniform and universal* experience. In the testimony of the early Christian witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, we have testimony of the *highest kind possible*; and to throw upon it the suspicion that attaches to the most untrustworthy class of witnesses, as Hume does, is an instance of sophistry of the highest order.

NOTE C, P. 18.

That the assertion of the text is not lightly made will, I think, be manifest from the following extracts,—the one from a believer in the divine origin of the Mosaic record, and the other from one who rejects divine revelation. Professor James D. Dana, in the article on Cosmogony in his "Manual of Geology," in which he shows the correspondence between the order of events in the Mosaic cosmogony and that inferred from the combined study of geology and astronomy, sees in this correspondence a proof of the divine origin of the Mosaic record. "*This document,*" he says, "*if true, is of divine origin.* For no human mind was witness of the events; and no such mind in the early age of the world, unless gifted with superhuman intelligence, could have contrived such a scheme—would have placed the creation of the sun, the source of light to the earth, so long after the creation of light, even on the *fourth* day, and, what is equally singular, between the creation of plants and that of animals, when so important to both; and none could have reached to the depths of philosophy exhibited in the whole plan. Again, *If divine, the account must bear the marks of human imperfection, since it was communicated through man.* Ideas suggested to a human mind by the Deity would take shape according to its range of knowledge, modes of thought, and use of language, unless it were at the same time supernaturally gifted with the profound knowledge and wisdom adequate to their conception; and even then they could not be intelligibly expressed, for want of words to represent them." After showing the correspondence between the Mosaic order and that deduced from science, Professor Dana concludes—"The record in the Bible is, therefore, profoundly philosophical in the scheme of creation which it presents. It is both true and divine. It is a declaration of authorship, both of Creation and of the Bible, on the first page of the sacred volume."—*Manual of Geology*, pp. 845 *et seq.*

The other extract is from Professor Haeckel's "History of Creation." "The Mosaic history of creation," he says, "has enjoyed, down to the present day, general recognition in the whole Jewish and Christian world of civilization. Its extraordinary success is explained not only by its close connection with Jewish and Christian doctrines, but also by the simple and natural chain of ideas which runs through it, and which contrasts favourably with the confused mythology of creation current among most of the other ancient nations. First, the Lord God creates the earth as an inorganic body; then He separates light from darkness, then water from the dry land. Now the earth

has become inhabitable for organisms, and plants are first created, animals later—and among the latter the inhabitants of the water and the air first, afterwards the inhabitants of the dry land. Finally, God creates man, the last of all organisms, in His own image, and as the ruler of the earth.

“Two great and fundamental ideas, common also to the non-miraculous theory of development, meet us in this Mosaic hypothesis of creation, with surprising clearness and simplicity—the idea of separation or *differentiation*, and the idea of progressive development or *perfecting*. Although Moses looks upon the results of the great laws of organic development as the direct actions of a constructing Creator, yet in his theory there lies hidden the ruling idea of a progressive development and a differentiation of the originally simple matter. We can therefore bestow our just and sincere admiration on the Jewish lawgiver's grand insight into nature, and his simple and natural hypothesis of creation,” but he adds, “without discovering in it a so-called divine revelation.”—*History of Creation*, pp. 37, 38.

Haeckel's not “discovering a divine revelation” where Dana and others see it, is owing, of course, to the fact that his mind is previously made up that there can be no such thing as divine revelation, and that his “scientific materialism,” to use his own words, “positively rejects every belief in the miraculous, and every conception, in whatever form it appears, of supernatural processes.” His first objection against the reception of the Mosaic record as a divine revelation, viz., that it *asserts* (so he says) that the earth is the fixed central point of the whole universe, one would have thought too stale for repetition in our time. The second objection, That man is represented as the premeditated aim of the creation of the earth, might be expected from one who scorns *final causes*, and *excludes all purpose* from the order of things.

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